

MIRS Capitol Capsule, Monday, March 7, 2011

The Bureau of Employment Relations (BER) conducted the two elections that opponents of the union cried "foul" over. These elections brought home-based day care center operators into AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) union and the home health care workers into the SEIU (State Employee International Union).

Opponents of bringing the two groups into the unions argue that the unionization took place via stealth elections wherein most of those being impacted weren't even aware that a vote was taking place.

Today, **MIRS interviewed BER Director Ruth Ann OKUN about the April 2005 statewide election which resulted in the home help care workers being unionized under the SEIU.** The home-based day care election occurred Nov. 2006.

MBER sent out 43,000 ballots to home health care workers. The purpose of the election was to decide whether or not they'd become members of the SEIU. The election results were: 6,949 "yes," 1,007 "no" and 589 spoiled. The 8,532 turnout for the election represented a little more than 19 percent of the 43,000 ballots that had been sent out.

Q. Was there any notifications in the news media -- notices in newspapers, on radio or television -- to let people know this election was taking place?

"I don't know."

Q. But your agency didn't do any notifications?

"No. We followed the rules and regulations for these elections. Those don't include doing any of those things."

Q. So how was someone who might have been opposed to this supposed to even know it was happening?

"Someone could have told them. There was nothing different about this than any of the other elections we hold."

Q. In those elections it's usual for no one in the news media or many of those involved to not even know about it?

"It was no different than the other elections we conduct. Like if it were the employees of the city of Lansing having this kind of election . . . someone might tell the newspaper about it."

Q. Isn't it likely that with no notification of the election at all, many of those people who could have voted just tossed the envelope away, not realizing their business could have had anything to do with any union?

"We did what the law specifies. They might have heard about it (the election) from someone, or had contact with the union."

Q. You gave the example of the city of Lansing as an employer, but who was the employer for this election?

"The MQCCC."

Q. What basis did the MQCCC have for claiming these people were their employees?

"They certified that they were their employees."

Opponents of the so-called forced unionization argue that neither the MQCCC nor the MHBCCC had any standing to make the claim that those entities were the employers of those who were eventually unionized.